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STANDARDIZATION AND INSPECTION¹

J. A. DUNAWAY

University of Pennsylvania

In the ten minutes I have, I want to apply some of the principles of standardization to the inspection service of the city. Now of course in ten minutes I could not even outline the extent and importance of the inspection work of a city the size of Philadelphia. But that it is important and becomes more so with each extension of the city's activity, is too well known to need repetition. In the first place I want to give some of the results of one very significant attempt at the introduction of standards in the inspection service. This was made by the registrar, in the bureau of water in Philadelphia. What he tried to do was to find the best method of procedure and have it followed, and to keep such records that a standard day's work could be determined.

The forty-five inspectors in this division count water fixtures, read meters, and inspect for the waste of water in dwellings. This data is used for the basis of water rent charges. Formerly each inspector was given a certain number of political wards and turned loose to collect his data as he saw fit. He made out his own route. There was no outside supervision, and no one knew for sure how many hours a day a man worked, or indeed whether or not he worked at all. It didn't take a man long to compile a book with all the dwellings in his district listed and all the fixtures counted and entered therein. Now water fixtures in a house are fairly constant in number. Changes generally consist in additions. No consumer kicks because of an under-charge, so an inspector could write up his report from the door-step, the corner

¹ An address before the American Political Science Association at its annual meeting in Washington, D. C., December 29, 1915.

saloon, or even his own home, and no one would know the difference. The introduction of meters made some complications, but even then it was not difficult to compute this quarter's bill on the basis of last quarter's reading, and it was fairly safe, provided the computation was low enough.

All this has been changed. The inspector is supervised, his work is planned for him. He is given a master route which he must follow. He has typewritten instructions as to his duties at each address, with blank spaces left for the questions he must answer on the basis of his inspection. When these instructions are followed and the blanks filled out, they constitute a report on each house. He must also make a complete daily report, showing where on his route he began, where he quit, the number of inspections, the number of no responses, the number of notices served, etc. A chief inspector acts as a free lance, not as a spy, but to check up the accuracy of the work. Carefully kept records make it easy in this way to determine what is a standard day's work, and how far above or below the standard each man falls. The number of mistakes each man makes can also be determined. This complete record is kept up to date and posted monthly. In short, the good work can be sorted from the bad, but at present it cannot be rewarded. All inspectors receive the same salary, and there is no standard provision for promotion. An inspector receives as much salary the day he begins working for the city as the day he dies of old age. In fact the registrar found that six of his forty-five inspectors were so old and decrepit, they could not assume any new duties or learn a new method of work, nor were they able to do a standard day's work. But there is no provision for pensioning these men. They must remain inspectors though they lower the tone and efficiency of the whole division.

To my mind this attempt at the introduction of standards is far more important and significant than the actual results already obtained. It is a forecast for the future. In spite of the handicaps, however, the results have been all that could be hoped for. The quality of work has been vastly improved. There is an incentive to the men to do good work, even if it is

nothing more than beating the record. And the quantity of the work has likewise increased. In 1911, about 62,000 inspections were made, while in 1912, 292,000 were made by the same force, and the water rent on the same properties was increased by over \$150,000. In short, the standard of efficiency has been steadily raised.

One of the most fertile fields for standardization is in the handling of complaints. Now the way a complaint is handled means more to the individual citizen than almost any other phase of municipal administration. You might steal the city hall or save the city ten million dollars and the ordinary citizen would not get unduly excited about it. But he is tremendously concerned about the way a matter he has complained of is handled—and in far too many instances, these matters are handled very badly. I have in mind the almost everlasting reference of complaints from one bureau or department to another—while the complainant waits. True there are reasons, principally the lack of uniformity of the laws and ordinances which have placed so many things under conflicting jurisdictions and commanded bureaus and departments to do things without giving them the necessary power. Thus a bureau operating under a fixed (and inadequate) appropriation shoves every possible matter into this twilight zone over which no one has authority. When a crisis comes or something happens, the bureau saves its face by pointing to its record. “This matter was referred on such and such a date to such and such a bureau for its attention.” Director Cooke in the course of the multitude of improvements which he has instituted in Philadelphia, long ago realized this problem of the foot-balling of matters from bureau to bureau but unfortunately his term of office was too short, and the handicaps too great to do every thing which needed to be done. I have in mind an illustration which came to light in a study I undertook at his suggestion. It is the story of two bricks which on the fifth of June were taken from the private alley-way of an Irish widow and used to finish repaving around a fire plug. The widow was frankly angry. She called up city hall the same day and threatened to sue the city. She got little satisfaction out of that, so she wrote a letter imme-

diately to the bureau of water. The chief of this bureau received the letter, sent it to the proper water district, and wrote the widow promising a prompt investigation. The Purveyor of this district made a personal investigation and found the widow had stated the facts correctly. Her bricks had been pried up, and were now reposing by the fire plug. But did he replace the bricks? No indeed, though there were 40,000 belonging to the city in his back yard. He looked up his record and found that *his* workmen had not done the job in question, so the water bureau could not be at fault. He made this report to his chief, who again wrote to the widow and promised to refer the matter to the bureau of highways for its attention. On June 19, the reference came to a division engineer in the highway bureau, who sent it to the proper highway district (which has an office in the same building with the purveyor of water, who had originally looked into the complaint). On June 23, a district inspector of the highways bureau reviewed the scene, but did not replace the bricks. He saw the damage and so reported. His superior looked up the records and found a certain contractor responsible for the job of repaving, and notified the contractor to replace the bricks. I went with the inspector to view the scene on July 12—his third visit, five weeks after the complaint had been made, and the two moss covered bricks were still reposing by the fire plug, while the alley-way of the widow showed a corresponding vacancy. The subsequent history of this affair I do not know. But it is not an exaggerated or isolated instance. The same procedure is gone through with thousands of times each year, only most complaints are more serious, and many, concerning buildings, sewers, water, streets, etc., wend their way through four or five bureaus instead of two. A booklet classifying complaints, showing to what bureau each should be addressed has helped steer many in the right channel. But unfortunately, it has not stopped many unnecessary references.

It seems to me that before we can even approximate efficiency in city administration, there must be the widest possible extension of the application of standards. Then good work can be recognized. Good work must be rewarded by promotion—promotion

based on merit. The laws and ordinances must be revised to eliminate this "twilight zone." It must no longer serve as an excuse for the non-performance of duty. Under the present arrangements not even the proverbial Philadelphia lawyer can tell just who is to blame. The individual citizen certainly is helpless. I do not wonder he views with alarm every extension of the city's activity when he must wait six weeks for the answer to a simple complaint while it is being shifted from one bureau to another, finally ending in that "no man's land," over which no one has authority. One possible way out of the difficulty would be a central bureau of complaints and inspection to receive and investigate all complaints, serve the proper notice on the property owner, or notify the proper city department of the action needed, as the facts might warrant. This would save the city's money—spent today in double and triple inspection. But better still, it would fix responsibility—which makes for efficiency. And it would enable the citizen to see "the wheels go round," and so make it worth his while to take an interest in the city's business.